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ABSTRACT

This briefing paper provides answers to frequently asked questions about special education. It is divided into sections addressing student evaluation, special education eligibility, writing an Individualized Education Program (IEP), re-evaluation, and other special education issues. Specifically, information is provided on: (1) the purpose of special education; (2) eligibility for special education; (3) student evaluation; (4) parental permission for additional assessments for eligibility; (5) how school's collect information about a child to determine eligibility; (6) how decisions are made about eligibility; (7) what happens if a child is not eligible for services; (8) types of information included in an IEP; (9) development of the IEP; (10) statements included in the IEP; (11) parent participation in the IEP; (12) preparation for an IEP meeting; (13) the process of writing an IEP; (14) related services as listed in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; (15) revisions to IEPs; (16) how children are re-evaluated for eligibility; (17) school responsibility for ensuring that children reach their goals on their IEPs; (18) what parents should do if they disagree with school decisions; (19) how parents can advocate for more services; and (20) how parents can support their child's learning. (CR)

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NICHCY

BRIEFING PAPER

LG1, 4TH EDITION, SEPTEMBER 1999

QUESTIONS OFTEN ASKED BY PARENTS ABOUT SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

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NICHCY

LG1, 4th Edition, September 1999

BRIEFING PAPER

A publication of the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities

Questions Often Asked by Parents About Special Education Services

I think my child may need special help in school. What do I do?

Begin by finding out more about special services and programs for students in your school system. Also find out more about the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This law gives eligible children with disabilities the right to receive special services and assistance in school. These services are known as *special education and related services*. They can be important in helping your child at school.

To learn more about special education, keep reading. This *Briefing Paper* will also help you learn how you and the school can work together to help your child.

What *is* special education?

Special education is instruction that is specially designed to meet the unique needs of children who have disabilities. This is done at no cost to the parents. Special education can include special instruction in the classroom, at home, in hospitals or institutions, or in other settings.

Over 5 million children ages 6 through 21 receive special education and related services each year in the United States. Each of these children receives instruction that is specially designed:

- to meet the child's unique needs (that result from having a disability); and
- to help the child learn the information and skills that other children are learning.

This definition of special education comes from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Public Law 105-17.

Who is eligible for special education?

Certain children with disabilities are eligible for special education and related services. The IDEA provides a definition of a "child with a disability." This law lists 13 different disability categories under which a child may be found eligible for special education and related

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services. These categories are listed in the box below.

According to the IDEA, the disability must affect the child's educational performance. The question of eligibility, then, comes down to a question of whether the child has a disability that fits in one of IDEA's 13 categories *and* whether that disability affects how the child does in school. That is, the disability must cause the child to need special education and related services.

IDEA's Categories of Disability

Autism

Deafness

Deaf-blindness

Hearing impairment

Mental retardation

Multiple disabilities

Orthopedic impairment

Other health impairment

Serious emotional disturbance

Specific learning disability

Speech or language impairment

Traumatic brain injury

Visual impairment, including blindness

To find out more about these disabilities and how IDEA defines them, contact NICHCY and ask for "General Information about Disabilities."

I. Your Child's Evaluation

How do I find out if my child is eligible for special education?

The first step is to find out if your child has a disability. To do this, ask the school to *evaluate* your child. Call or write the Director of Special Education or the principal of your child's school. Say that you think your child has a disability and needs special education help. Ask the school to evaluate your child as soon as possible.

The public school may also think your child needs special help, because he or she may have a disability. If so, then *the school must evaluate your child at no cost to you.*

However, the school does not have to evaluate your child just because you have asked. The school may not think your child has a disability or needs special education. In this case, the school may refuse to evaluate your child. It must let you know this decision in writing, as well as why it has refused.

If the school refuses to evaluate your child, there are two things you can do immediately:

- Ask the school system for information about its special education policies, as well as parent rights to disagree with decisions made by the school system. These materials should describe the steps parents can take to challenge a school system's decision.
- Get in touch with your state's Parent Training and Information (PTI) center. The PTI is an excellent resource for parents to learn more about special education, their rights and responsibilities, and the law. The PTI can tell you what steps to take next to find help for your child. Call NICHCY to find out how to get in touch with your PTI, or see our *State Resource Sheet* for your state. The PTI is listed there.

What happens during an evaluation?

Evaluating your child means more than the school just giving your child a test or two. The school must evaluate your child in all the areas where your child may be affected by the possible disability. This may include looking at your child's health, vision, hearing, social and emotional well-being, general intelligence, performance in school, and how well your child communicates with others and uses his or her body. The evaluation must be complete enough (full and individual) to identify all of your child's needs for special education and related services.

Evaluating your child appropriately will give you and the school a lot of information about your child. This information will help you and the school:

- decide if your child has a disability; and
- design instruction for your child.

The evaluation process involves several steps. These are listed below.

Reviewing existing information. A group of people, including you, begins by looking at the informa-

tion the school already has about your child. You may have information about your child you wish to share as well. The group will look at information such as:

- your child's scores on tests given in the classroom or to all students in your child's grade;
- the opinions and observations of your child's teachers and other school staff who know your child; and
- your feelings, concerns, and ideas about how your child is doing in school.

Deciding if more information is still needed. The information collected above will help the group decide:

- if your son or daughter has a particular type of disability;
- how your child is currently doing in school;
- whether your child needs special education and related services; and
- what your child's educational needs are.

Group members will look at the information they collected above and see if they have enough information to make these decisions. If the group needs more information to make these decisions, the school must collect it.

Collecting more information about your child. If more information about your child is needed, the school will give your child tests or collect the information in other ways. Your informed written permission is required before the school may collect this information. The evaluation group will then have the information it needs to make the types of decisions listed above.

Services to Very Young Children

Infants and toddlers can have disabilities, too. Services to these very young children are also part of the IDEA. These services are called *early intervention services* (for children birth through two years) and *preschool services* (for children ages 3-5). These services can be very important in helping the young child develop and learn.

For more information about early intervention and preschool programs, contact NICHCY. Ask for *A Parent's Guide: Accessing Programs for Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers with Disabilities.*

So the school needs my permission to collect this extra information?

Yes. Before the school can conduct additional assessments of your child to see if he or she has a disability, the school must ask for your informed written permission. It must also describe how it will conduct this evaluation. This includes describing the tests that will be used and the other ways the school will collect information about your child. After you give your informed written permission, the school may evaluate your child.

How does the school collect this information?

The school collects information about your child from many different people and in many different ways. Tests are an important part of an evaluation, but they are only a part. The evaluation should also include:

- the observations and opinions of professionals who have worked with your child;
- your child's medical history, when it relates to his or her performance in school; and
- your ideas about your child's school experiences, abilities, needs, and behavior outside of school, and his or her feelings about school.

The following people will be part of the group evaluating your child:

- you, as parents;
- at least one regular education teacher, if your child is or may be participating in the regular education environment;
- at least one of your child's special education teachers or service providers;
- a school administrator who knows about policies for special education, about children with disabilities, about the general curriculum (the curriculum used by nondisabled students), and about available resources;
- someone who can interpret the evaluation results and talk about what instruction may be necessary for your child;
- individuals (invited by you or the school) who have knowledge or special expertise about your child;
- your child, if appropriate;

- representatives from any other agencies that may be responsible for paying for or providing transition services (if your child is 16 years or, if appropriate, younger and will be planning for life after high school); and
- other qualified professionals.

These other qualified professionals may be responsible for collecting specific kinds of information about your child. They may include:

- a school psychologist;
- an occupational therapist;
- a speech and language pathologist (sometimes called a speech therapist);
- a physical therapist and/or adaptive physical education therapist or teacher;
- a medical specialist; and
- others.

Professionals will observe your child. They may give your child written tests or talk personally with your child. They are trying to get a picture of the "whole child." For example, they want to understand:

- how well your child speaks and understands language;
- how your child thinks and behaves;
- how well your child adapts to changes in his or her environment;
- how well your child has done academically;
- what your child's potential or aptitude (intelligence) is;
- how well your child functions in a number of areas, such as moving, thinking, learning, seeing, hearing; and
- what job-related and other post-school interests and abilities your child has.

The IDEA gives clear directions about how schools must conduct evaluations. For example, tests and interviews must be given in your child's native language (for example, Spanish) or in the way he or she typically communicates (for example, sign language). The tests must also be given in a way that does not discriminate against your child, because he or she has a disability or is from a different racial or cultural background.

The IDEA states that schools may not place children into special education programs based on the results of only one procedure such as a test. More than one procedure is needed to see where your child may be having difficulty and to identify his or her strengths.

In some cases, schools will be able to conduct a child's entire evaluation within the school. In other cases, schools may not have the staff to do all of the evaluation needed. These schools will have to hire outside people or agencies to do some or all of the evaluation. If your child is evaluated outside of the school, the school must make the arrangements. The school will say in writing exactly what type of testing is to be done. All of these evaluation procedures are done at no cost to parents.

In some cases, once the evaluation has begun, the outside specialist may want to do more testing. If the specialist asks you if it is okay to do more testing, make sure you tell the specialist to contact the school. If the testing is going beyond what the school originally asked for, the school needs to agree to pay for the extra testing.

II. Your Child's Eligibility

What does the school do with these evaluation results?

The information gathered from the evaluation will be used to make important decisions about your child's education. All of the information about your child will be used:

- to decide if your child is eligible for special education and related services; and
- to help you and the school decide what your child needs educationally.

How is a decision made about my child's eligibility for special education?

As was said earlier, the decision about your child's eligibility for services is based on whether your son or daughter has a disability that fits into one of the IDEA's 13 disability categories (see page 2) ***and*** whether that disability affects how your child does in school. This decision will be made when the evaluation has been completed, and the results are in.

In the past, parents were not involved under IDEA in making

the decision about their child's eligibility for special education and related services. Now, under the newest changes to IDEA (passed in 1997), parents are included in the group that decides a child's eligibility for special education services. This group will look at all of the information gathered during the evaluation and decide if your child meets the definition of a "child with a disability." (This definition will come from the IDEA and from the policies your state or district uses.) If so, your child will be eligible for special education and related services.

Under the IDEA, a child may *not* be found eligible for services if the determining reason for thinking the child is eligible is that:

- ✧ the child has limited English proficiency, or
- ✧ the child has a lack of instruction in math or reading.

If your child is found eligible, you and the school will work together to design an educational program for your child. This process is described in detail in Part III of this *Briefing Paper*.

As parents, you have the right to receive a copy of the evaluation report on your child and the paperwork about your child's eligibility for special education and related services.

What happens if my child is not eligible for services?

If the group decides that your child is not eligible for special education services, the school system must tell you this in writing and explain why your child has been found "not eligible." Under the IDEA, you must also be given information about what you can do if you disagree with this decision.

Read the information the school system gives you. Make sure it includes information about how to challenge the school system's decision. If that information is not in the materials the school gives you, ask the school for it.

Also get in touch with your state's Parent Training and Information (PTI) center. The PTI can tell you what steps to take next. Your PTI is listed on NICHCY's *State Resource Sheet* for your state.

III. Writing an IEP

So my child has been found eligible for special education. What next?

The next step is to write what is known as an *Individualized Education Program*—usually called an IEP. After a child is found eligible, a meeting must be held within 30 days to develop to the IEP.

What is an Individualized Education Program?

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a written statement of the educational program designed to meet a child's individual needs. Every child who receives special education services must have an IEP.

The IEP has two general purposes: (1) to set reasonable learning goals for your child; and (2) to state the services that the school district will provide for your child.

What type of information is included in an IEP?

According to the IDEA, your child's IEP must include specific statements about your child. These are listed in the box on page 6 entitled "What Information is in Your Child's IEP?" Take a moment to read over this list. This will be the information included in your child's IEP.

It is very important that children with disabilities participate in the general curriculum as much as possible. That is, they should learn the same curriculum as nondisabled children, for example, reading, math, science, social studies, and physical education, just as nondisabled children do. In some cases, this curriculum may need to be adapted for your child to learn, but it should not be omitted altogether. Participation in extracurricular activities and other nonacademic activities is also important. Your child's IEP needs to be written with this in mind.

For example, what special education services will help your child participate in the general curriculum—in other words, to study what other students are studying? What special education services or supports will help your child take part in extracurricular activities such as school clubs or sports? When your child's IEP is developed, an important part of the discussion will be how to help your child take part in regular classes and activities in the school.

Who develops my child's IEP?

Many people come together to develop your child's IEP. This group is called the IEP team and includes most of the same types of individuals who were involved in your child's evaluation. Team members will include:

- you, the parents;
- at least one regular education teacher, if your child is (or may be) participating in the regular education environment;
- at least one of your child's special education teachers or special education providers;
- a representative of the public agency (school system) who (a) is qualified to provide or supervise the provision of special education, (b) knows about the general curriculum; and (c) knows about the resources the school system has available;

(continued on page 7) ➥

What Information is in Your Child's IEP?

Your child's IEP will contain the following statements:

- *Present levels of educational performance.* This statement describes how your child is currently doing in school. This includes how your child's disability affects his or her involvement and progress in the general curriculum.
- *Annual goals.* The IEP must state annual goals for your child, meaning what you and the school team think he or she can reasonably accomplish in a year. This statement of annual goals includes individual steps that make up the goals (often called short-term *objectives*) or major milestones (often called *benchmarks*). The goals must relate to meeting the needs that result from your child's disability. They must also help your son or daughter be involved in and progress in the general curriculum.
- *Special education and related services to be provided.* The IEP must list the special education and related services to be provided to your child. This includes supplementary aids and services (such as a communication device). It also includes changes to the program or supports for school personnel that will be provided for your child.
- *Participation with nondisabled children.* How much of the school day will your child be educated separately from nondisabled children or not participate in extracurricular or other nonacademic activities such as lunch or clubs? The IEP must include an explanation that answers this question.
- *Participation in state and district-wide assessments.* Your state and district probably give tests of student achievement to children in certain grades or age groups. In order to participate in these tests, your child may need individual modifications or changes in how the tests are administered. The IEP team must decide what modifications your child needs and list them in the IEP. If your child will not be taking these tests, the IEP must include a statement as to why the tests are not appropriate for your child and how your child will be tested instead.
- *Dates and location.* The IEP must state (a) *when* services and modifications will begin; (b) *how often* they will be provided; (c) *where* they will be provided; and (d) *how long* they will last.
- *Transition service needs.* If your child is age 14 (or younger, if the IEP team determines it appropriate), the IEP must include a statement of his or her transition service needs. Transition planning will help your child move through school from grade to grade.
- *Transition services.* If your child is age 16 (or younger, if determined appropriate by the IEP team), the IEP must include a statement of needed transition services and, if appropriate, a statement of the interagency responsibilities or any needed linkages.
- *Measuring progress.* The IEP must state how school personnel will measure your child's progress toward the annual goals. It must also state how you, as parents, will be informed regularly of your child's progress and whether that progress is enough to enable your child to achieve his or her goals by the end of the year.

- an individual who can interpret the evaluation results and talk about what instruction may be necessary for your child;
- your child, when appropriate;
- representatives from any other agencies that may be responsible for paying for or providing transition services (if your child is 16 years or, if appropriate, younger); and
- other individuals (invited by you or the school) who have knowledge or special expertise about your child. For example, you may wish to invite a relative who is close to the child or a child care provider.

Together, these people will work as a team to develop your child's IEP.

So I can help develop my child's IEP?

Yes, absolutely. The law is very clear that parents have the right to participate in developing their child's IEP. In fact, your input is *invaluable*. You know your child so very well, and the school needs to know your insights and concerns.

The school staff will try to schedule the IEP meeting at a time that is convenient for all team members to attend. If the school suggests a time that is impossible for you, explain your schedule and needs. It's important that you attend this meeting and share your ideas about your child's needs and strengths. Often, another time or date can be arranged. However, if you cannot agree on a time or date, the school may hold the IEP meeting without you. In this event, the school must keep you informed, for example, by phone or mail.

What should I do before the IEP meeting?

The purpose of the IEP meeting is to develop your child's Individualized Education Program. You can prepare for this meeting by:

- making a list of your child's strengths and weaknesses,
- talking to teachers and/or therapists and getting their thoughts about your child,
- visiting your child's class and perhaps other classes that may be helpful to him or her, and
- talking to your child about his or her feelings toward school.

It is a good idea to write down what you think your child can accomplish during the school year. It also helps to make notes about what you would like to say during the meeting.

What happens during an IEP meeting?

During the IEP meeting, the different members of the IEP team share their thoughts and suggestions. If this is the first IEP meeting after your child's evaluation, the team may go over the evaluation results, so your child's strengths and needs will be clear. These results will help the team decide what special help your child needs in school.

Remember that you are a very important part of the IEP team.

You know your child better than anyone. Don't be shy about speaking up, even though there may be a lot of other people at the meeting. Share what you know about your child and what you wish others to know.

After the various team members (including you, the parent) have shared their thoughts and concerns about your child, the group will have a better idea of your child's strengths and needs. This will allow the team to discuss and decide on:

- the educational and other goals that are appropriate for your child; and
- the type of special education services your child needs.

The IEP team will also talk about the *related services* your child may need to benefit from his or her special education. The IDEA lists many related services that schools must provide if eligible children need them. The related services listed in IDEA are presented in the box on page 8. Examples of related services include:

- occupational therapy, which can help a child develop or regain movement that he or she may have lost due to injury or illness; and
- speech therapy (called speech-language pathology), which can help children who have trouble speaking.

Depending on the needs of your child, the IEP team may also discuss the special factors listed below:

- *If your child's behavior's interferes with his or her learning or the learning of others:* The IEP team will talk about strategies

and supports to address your child's behavior.

- *If your child has limited proficiency in English:* The IEP team will talk about your child's language needs as these needs relate to his or her IEP.
- *If your child is blind or visually impaired:* The IEP team must provide for instruction in Braille or the use of Braille, unless it determines after an appropriate evaluation that your child does not need this instruction.
- *If your child has communication needs:* The IEP team must consider those needs.
- *If your child is deaf or hard of hearing:* The IEP team will consider your child's language and communication needs. This includes your child's opportunities to communicate directly with classmates and school staff in his or her usual method of communication (for example, sign language).

The IEP team will also talk about whether your child needs any *assistive technology devices or services.* Assistive technology devices can help many children do certain activities or tasks. Examples of these devices are:

- devices that make the words bigger on the computer screen or that "read" the typed words aloud—which can help children who do not see well;
- electronic talking boards—which can help students who have trouble speaking; and
- computers and special programs for the computer—which can help students with all kinds of disabilities learn more easily.

Assistive technology services include evaluating your child to see if he or she could benefit from using an assistive device. These services also include providing the devices and training your child (or your family or the professionals who work with your child) to use the device.

As you can see, there are a lot of important matters to talk about in an IEP meeting. You may feel very emotional during the meeting, as everyone talks about your child's needs. Try to keep in mind that the other team members are all there to help your child. If you hear something about your child which surprises you, or which is different from the way you see your child, bring this to the attention of the other members of the team. In order to design a good program for your child, it is important to work closely with the other team members and share your feelings about your child's educational needs. Feel free to ask questions and offer opinions and suggestions.

Based on the above discussions, the IEP team will then write your child's IEP. This includes the services and supports the school will provide for your child. It will also include the *location* where particular services will be provided. Your child's placement (where the IEP will be carried out) will be determined every year, must be based on your child's IEP, and must be as close as possible to your child's home. The placement decision is made by a group of persons, *including you the parent,* and others knowledgeable about your child, the meaning of the evaluation data, and the placement options. In some states, the IEP team makes the placement decision. In other states, the placement decision is made by another group of people.

Related Services, as listed in IDEA

Transportation

Speech-language pathology

Audiology services

Psychological services

Physical therapy

Occupational therapy

Recreation (including therapeutic recreation)

Early identification and assessment of disabilities in children

Counseling services (including rehabilitation counseling)

Orientation & mobility services

Medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes

School health services

Social work services in schools

Parent counseling & training

This list does not include every related service a child might need or that a school system may offer. To learn more about these related services and how IDEA defines them, contact NICHCY and ask for our News Digest on Related Services.

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In all cases, you as parents have the right to be members of the group that makes decisions on the educational placement of your child.

Depending on the needs of your child and the services to be provided, your child's IEP could be carried out:

- in regular classes,
- in special classes (where all the students are receiving special education services),
- in special schools,
- at home,
- in hospitals and institutions, and
- in other settings.

Which of these placements is best suited for your child? Can he or she be educated in the regular classroom, with supplementary aids and services? (The IDEA prefers this placement.) If not, then the placement group will look at other placements for your child. Before the school system can provide your child with special education *for the first time*, you, as parents, must give your written consent.

Can my child's IEP be changed?

Yes. At least once a year a meeting must be scheduled with you to review your child's progress and develop your child's next IEP. The meeting will be similar to the IEP meeting described above. The team will talk about:

- your child's progress toward the goals in the current IEP,
- what new goals should be added, and
- whether any changes need to be made to the special education and related services your child receives.

This annual IEP meeting allows you and the school to review your child's educational program and change it as necessary. But you don't have to wait for this annual review. You (or any other team member) may ask to have your child's IEP reviewed or revised at any time.

You as parents have the right to be members of the group that makes decisions on the educational placement of your child.

For example, you may feel that your child is not making good progress toward his or her annual goals. Or you may want to write new goals, because your son or daughter has made such great progress! Call the principal of the school, or the special education director or your child's teacher, and express your concerns. If necessary, they will call the IEP team together to talk about changing your child's IEP.

IV. Re-evaluation

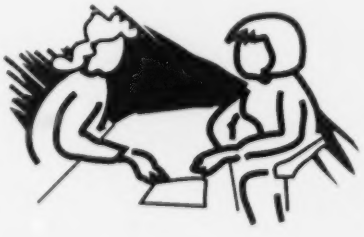
Will my child be re-evaluated?

Yes. Under the IDEA, your child must be re-evaluated at least every three years. The purpose of this re-evaluation is to find out:

- if your child continues to be a "child with a disability," as defined within the law, and
- your child's educational needs.

The re-evaluation is similar to the initial evaluation. It begins by looking at the information already available about your child. More information is collected only if it's needed. If the group decides that additional assessments are needed, you must give your informed written permission before the school system may collect that information. The school system may only go ahead without your informed written permission if they have tried to get your permission and you did not respond.

Although the law requires that children with disabilities be re-evaluated at least every three years, your child may be re-evaluated more often if you or your child's teacher(s) request it.



Is the school responsible for ensuring that my child reaches the goals in his or her IEP?

No. The IEP sets out the individualized instruction to be provided to your child, but it is not a contract. The school is responsible for providing the instructional services listed in an IEP. School officials must make a good-faith effort to help your child meet his or her goals. However, the school is not responsible if your child does not reach the goals listed in the IEP. If you feel that your child is not making progress toward his or her goals, then you may wish to contact the school and express your concerns. The IEP team may need to meet and revise your child's IEP.

What if I disagree with the school about what is right for my child?

You have the right to disagree with the school's decisions concerning your child. This includes decisions about:

- your child's identification as a "child with a disability,"
- his or her evaluation,
- his or her educational placement, and
- the special education and related services that the school provides to your child.

In all cases where the family and school disagree, it is important for both sides to first discuss their concerns and try to compromise. The compromise can be temporary. For example, you might agree to try out a particular plan of instruction or classroom placement for a certain period of time. At the end of that period, the school can check your child's progress. You and other members of your child's IEP team can then meet again, talk about how your child is doing, and decide what to do next. The trial period may help you and the school come to a comfortable agreement on how to help your child.

If you still cannot agree with the school, it's useful to know more about the IDEA's protections for parents and children. The law and regulations include ways for parents and schools to resolve disagreements. These include:

- *mediation*, where you and school personnel sit down with an impartial third person (called a mediator), talk openly about the areas where you disagree, and try to reach agreement;
- *due process*, where you and the school present evidence before an impartial third person (called a hearing officer), and he or she decides how to resolve the problem; and
- *filing a complaint with the State Education Agency (SEA)*, where you write directly to the SEA and describe what requirement of IDEA the school has violated. The SEA must either resolve your complaint itself, or it can have a system where complaints are filed with the school district and parents can have the district's decision reviewed by the SEA. In most cases, the SEA must resolve your complaint within 60 calendar days.

Your state will have specific ways for parents and schools to resolve their differences. You will need to find out what your state's policies are. Your local department of special education will probably have these guidelines. If not, contact the state department of education and ask for a copy of their special education policies. The telephone number and address of the state department of education are listed on NICHCY's *State Resource Sheet* for your state.

You may also wish to call the Parent Training and Information (PTI) center in your state. We've mentioned the PTI several times in this *Briefing Paper*. They are an excellent resource for parents to learn more about special education. Your PTI is listed on NICHCY's *State Resource Sheet* for your state.

How can I get more services for my child?

Suppose your child gets speech therapy two times a week, and you think he or she needs therapy three times a week. What do you do?

First, you can talk with your child's teacher or speech-language pathologist (sometimes called a speech therapist). Ask to see the evaluation of his or her progress. If you are not satisfied with your child's progress, then request an IEP meeting to review your child's progress and increase speech therapy. Discuss your child's needs with the IEP team and talk about changing the IEP. The other team members will either agree with you and change the IEP, or they will disagree with you.

If the rest of the IEP team does not agree that your child needs more services, try to work out a compromise. If you cannot, then parents can take the problem beyond the IEP team. As was mentioned above, mediation, due process, and filing a complaint are ways to resolve disagreements. But always remember that you and the school will be making decisions together about your child's education for as long as your child goes to that school and continues to be eligible for special education services. A good working relationship with school staff is important now and in the future. Therefore, when disagreements arise, try to work them out within the IEP team before requesting mediation or due process or before filing a complaint.

How can I support my child's learning?

Here are some suggestions that can help you support your child's learning and maintain a good working relationship with school professionals:

- Let your child's teacher(s) know that you want to be involved in your child's educational program. Make time to talk with the teacher(s) and, if possible, visit the classroom.
- Explain any special equipment, medication, or medical problem your child has.
- Let the teacher(s) know about any activities or big events that may influence your child's performance in school.
- Ask that samples of your child's work be sent home. If you have questions, make an appointment with the teacher(s) to talk about new ways to meet your child's goals.
- Ask the teacher(s) how you can build upon your child's school activities at home.
- Give your child chores at home. Encourage behavior that leads to success in school, such as accepting responsibility, behaving, being organized, and being on time.
- Volunteer to help in the classroom or school. This will let you see how things work in the school and how your child interacts with others. It will also help the school.
- Remember that you and the school want success for your child. Working together can make this happen.

Talking to Other Parents Helps!

You can learn a lot from talking to parents of children who are already receiving special education services. There are many different local parent groups. Find one, and go to a meeting. If there aren't any groups in your area, contact the nearest group and ask for its newsletter. These can be full of information, too!

How do you find parent groups? NICHCY has a *State Resource Sheet* for your state. This sheet is a good source of information about parent groups or disability groups in your state. These state groups can tell you about groups in your area. If you do not already have a *State Resource Sheet*, call NICHCY and ask for one. It's free and can be very useful.

What if I still have questions and need more information?

You can contact your state's Parent Training and Information (PTI) center. Your PTI will have a lot of information to share about the special education process in your state.

You can also contact NICHCY again. We have information on all aspects of the IEP process. We also have information on other issues that are important to families who have a child with a disability. NICHCY staff can send you more publications (see NICHCY's catalog or visit our Web site at: www.nichcy.org), answer questions, and put you in touch with other organizations who can work with you and your family.

It would be our pleasure!

NICHCY *Briefing Papers* are published in response to questions from individuals and organizations. NICHCY also disseminates other materials and can respond to individual requests for information. For further information or assistance, or to receive a NICHCY *Publications Catalog*, contact NICHCY, P.O. Box 1492, Washington, DC 20013. Telephone: 1-800-695-0285 (Voice/TTY) and (202) 884-8200 (Voice/TTY). You can e-mail us (nichcy@aed.org) or visit our Web site (www.nichcy.org), where you will find all of our publications.

Director	Suzanne Ripley
Assistant Director	Donna Waghorn
Editor/Author	Lisa Küpper

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NICHCY

National Information Center
for Children and Youth with Disabilities
P.O. Box 1492
Washington, DC 20013
(800) 695-0285 (V/TTY)
(202) 884-8200 (V/TTY)
E-mail: nichcy@aed.org
Web: www.nichcy.org

IDEAs that Work
Office of Special Education Programs

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